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MUFTI JAKUB SZYNKIEWICZ'S TRAVEL TO YUGOSLAVIA IN 1930

Abstract: The article discusses the travel diary of Jakub Szynkiewicz, the Mufti of Polish Muslims, from his trip to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1930. The aim of the Mufti's trip was to attend the celebrations connected with the reisu-l-ulema of the Muslims of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by Hafiz Ibrahim Maglajlic. Szynkiewicz's report has both literary and historical values. The Polish Mufti was mainly interested in Muslim issues describing the reisu-l-ulema ceremony, presenting the reader with details of behind-the-scene games related to the election of a new representative of Yugoslavian Muslims and describing the characteristics of Islam's followers and their relations with other religious and ethnic groups inhabiting this area.

Keywords: Jakub Szynkiewicz, Polish Tatars, Islam, reisu-l-ulema, travel diary, Yugoslavia.

Jakub Szynkiewicz's writings are connected with his function as the chairman of the Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Poland. Many of his travel diaries entries in the period of 1926–1937 detailed his official trips as Polish Mufti to such Muslim countries¹ as Syria, Palestine,

¹ Originally, the texts were prepared by Szynkiewicz as materials for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and for the Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment, and only then they were printed as literary works.

Hijaz, Egypt and Turkey as well as India and Yugoslavia. He included in his writings information about the customs of the inhabitants of the Islamic world which would have been interesting for Polish Muslims and presented stories of his adventures while travelling as travel diaries².

Born in 1884 in Lachowicze of present-day Belarus, Szynekiewicz belonged to a small Tatar minority of about 6,000 people³ that had inhabited the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania since the 14th century. From 1385 the Duchy was in a union with Poland and between 1569–1795 was an equal partner in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Originating from the Golden Horde, the Tatars, began to flow into Lithuanian-Polish lands as prisoners of war but later political refugees after 1358, when Khan Berdibek's death triggered a long-lasting power struggle⁴. Another wave of migration occurred in the 16th century after the Ivan IV the Terrible conquered the Kazan and Astrakhan Khanate by and in the 17th century during the Swedish Deluge⁵. The Tatars were famous in Polish history for being good soldiers, who participated in major war campaigns of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

When Szynekiewicz wrote his stories, the Tatars were an ethnic minority that was well integrated with the Poles. They had a relatively high number

See G. Czerwiński, *Sprawozdania z podróży muftiego Jakuba Szynekiewicza. Źródła, omówienie, interpretacja* [Mufti Jakub Szynekiewicz's Travel Diaries. Sources, Discussion, Interpretation], Białystok: Książnica Podlaska, 2013.

² In the interwar period, the accounts of Szynekiewicz's journey were quite popular both among the Tatars and Poles. It is worth mentioning here positive reviews of Mufti's reports, written by Bolesław Wit Świącicki for a journal "Kurier Wileński" (22 and 23 May 1931).

³ Data from 1918. See A. Pałasiewicz, [introduction to] J. Szynekiewicz, *Sprawozdanie muftiego Jakuba Szynekiewicza z podróży do Turcji, Syrii, Palestyny i Egiptu w roku 1932 (9.IV–9.IX)* [Travel Diary by Mufti Jakub Szynekiewicz from a Trip to Turkey, Syria, Palestine and Egypt in 1932 (08.04–09.09)], "Przegląd Orientalistyczny" 1977, no. 1, p. 41

⁴ On Tatar settlement in Poland see e.g. S. Kryczyński, *Tatarzy Litewscy. Próba monografii historyczno-etnograficznej* [Lithuanian Tatars. An Attempt at a Historical-Ethnographic Monograph], Warszawa: Rocznik Tatarski, 1938; J. Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy na Litwie i w Polsce. Studia z dziejów XIII–XVIII w.* [Tatars in Lithuania and Poland. Studies in the History of the 13th–18th Centuries], Warszawa: PWN, 1989; K. Grygajtis, *Osadnictwo Tatarów hospodarskich w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim XIV–XVIII w.* [Settlement of the Hospodar Tatars in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania 14th–18th Centuries], Gdańsk: Rocznik Tatarów Polskich, 2003.

⁵ Swedish Deluge – Sweden's invasion of the Commonwealth in 1655 during the Second Northern War (1655–1660).

of well-educated people who used the Polish language on a daily basis⁶, but cultivated their own traditions and religion – Islam. Until the end of the 20th century, the term “Polish Muslims” was synonymous with Polish Tatars.

Szynkiewicz was characteristic member of the Tatar minority. As a student of the Department of Eastern Languages of the University of St. Petersburg, he was active in the Club of Polish Muslim Dormitories. In 1919 he went to Berlin to continue his studies and in 1925 graduated with a doctorate degree in philosophy. In the same year, Szynkiewicz was chosen as the Mufti of Polish Muslims and held this formal function until his death in 1966. The word ‘formal’ is used on purpose because the author left Poland forever in 1944, first moving to Egypt and then to the United States⁷.

Szynkiewicz travelled mainly for official purposes. As a member of the Polish government delegation and the Mufti of the Republic of Poland, he travelled to Turkey in 1928 and to Egypt, Hijaz, Syria and Palestine in 1930. He also travelled to Yugoslavia in 1930. He participated in the World Muslim Congress in Cairo in 1926 and in the All-European Muslim Congress in Geneva in 1935. As a representative of Polish Muslims, Szynkiewicz travelled to the Middle East in 1932 to verify Polish copies of holy Islamic books and to East India in 1936 to obtain funds from other Muslims to build a mosque in Warsaw.

The fruits of these trips were the *Travel Diaries*. Although they were originally created as documents for the Polish government, they seem to have been written for Polish readers and believers in the Muslim religion in Poland. The reports have a literary character with many interesting and creative descriptions of oriental landscapes, people, cities and customs. They are also loaded with lyrical and emotional content, as well as the features of travel writing⁸.

⁶ Tatars lost their language belonging to a group of Kipchak dialects in the 16th century (see Cz. Łapicz, *Kitab Tatarów litewsko-polskich. Paleografia, grafia, język* [Kitab of Lithuanian-Polish Tatars. Paleography, Graphics, Language], Toruń: UMK, 1986).

⁷ To study the author's biography, see for example, S. Chazbijewicz, *Jakuba Szynkiewicza postać tragiczna* [Jakub Szynkiewicz, a Tragic Figure], “Przegląd Tatarski” 2011, no. 2, pp. 9–10.

⁸ From the point of view of literary critics, I analyze J. Szynkiewicz's works in my monograph: G. Czerwiński, *“Jam z rodu Nomadów”. Literatura polsko-tatarska po 1918 roku* [“I am from the Nomad”. Polish-Tatar Literature after 1918], Białystok: Alter Studio, 2017 (chapter “O sprawozdaniach z podróży muftiego Jakuba Szynkiewicza” [“On Travel Diaries of Mufti Jakub Szynkiewicz”], pp. 196–216).

This article's aim is to draw the reader's attention to *Travel Diary to Yugoslavia* from 1930. This text can be found in the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw (documents of the Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment, reference number 1477). The critical edition of this text has been included in the book entitled *Mufti Jakub Szynekiewicz's Travel Diaries. Sources, Discussion, Interpretation*⁹.

Szynekiewicz visited Yugoslavia several times in the interwar period. These trips were mainly related to the efforts of Polish Muslim Tatars to allow their children to go to Muslim schools in Yugoslavia, since they had neither have such schools nor the opportunity to acquire a thorough religious education in Poland. However, the system of Muslim schools in Yugoslavia was well developed and offered a high level of education¹⁰. Mufti Szynekiewicz went to Yugoslavia in August 1928 to discuss the possibility of the allowance of several pupils to junior high schools in Sarajevo and Skopje. Unfortunately, due to high costs of education, Tatar children were not able to attend¹¹. Szynekiewicz returned to Sarajevo in 1935 and managed to negotiate the acceptance of two students. In November 1935, he travelled there with two boys, twelve-year-old Jusuf Konopacki and fourteen-year-old Jan Lebień, who were taught several years in the well known madras – Gazi Husrev-beg (in Bosnian: Gazi Husrev-begova medresa)¹².

In the meantime, in 1930, Szynekiewicz went to Sarajevo and Belgrade once more, although he discussed the admission of Polish Tatar children to schools¹³, the main purpose was the participation of the Polish Mufti in the ceremonies connected with the reisu-l-ulema of Muslims in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by Hafiz Ibrahim Maglajlić. This journey, only one of those to Yugoslavia, was described by Szynekiewicz in his report titled *Travel Diary from the Trip to Yugoslavia*.

⁹ J. Szynekiewicz, *Sprawozdanie z podróży do Jugosławii* [Travel Diary from the Trip to Yugoslavia], in: G. Czerwiński, *Sprawozdania z podróży muftiego Jakuba Szynekiewicza. Źródła, omówienie, interpretacja* [Mufti Jakub Szynekiewicz's Travel Diaries. Sources, Discussion, Interpretation], Białystok: Książnica Podlaska, 2013, s. 131–145.

¹⁰ See U. Wróblewska, *Oświata Tatarów w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [Tatar Education in the Second Polish Republic], Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 2012, pp. 76–77.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 78. The Yugoslavian government allowed the placement of Polish children in school, but only on the condition that they pay tuition of 800 dinars a month.

¹² Jan Lebień returns to the country before the outbreak of World War II, while Jusuf Konopacki reaches Poland in 1946 (ibidem, pp. 79–80).

¹³ The author notes that the issue of Polish Tatars' education resulted in staying in Sarajevo a few days longer (op. cit., p.138).

Containing only about a dozen pages, the testimony has both literary and historical values today. In the description of his stay in Yugoslavia, Szynkiewicz does not provide neither any historical information about the country nor any descriptions of the landscape or cities, which would bring his text closer to travel prose. The Mufti focused primarily on such Muslim matters as the course of the *reisu-l-ulema* ceremony, details of behind-the-scenes games related to the election of a new representative of Yugoslavian Muslims and the characteristics of local Islamists and their relations with other religious and ethnic groups living in this area.

One of most distinguishing features of Szynkiewicz's report is that he objectively captured the personal travel experiences. The author often created a short description of individual characters, explained what impression an interlocutor made on him, repeated opinions and judgments heard from third parties and recorded people's reactions to events. The following fragment is how he described the *reisu-l-ulema*:

Reisu-l-ulema czekał w swoim gabinecie. Stary, siwy człowiek przeszło siedemdziesięciu lat, powitał mnie w języku arabskim, ale prędko przeszliśmy na język turecki. Nigdy do tego czasu jego nie widziałem i nazwiska nie słyszałem. Nazywa się Hadži Hafiz Ibrahim Maglajlić. Dotychczas był muftim w Banja Luka i znany był ze swego konserwatyzmu. Był ze mną bardzo uprzejmy, ale serdeczności, jaką wykazał mi dwa lata temu dawny reisu-l-ulema Čaušević, nie było. Nie mogę o nim wiele powiedzieć, rozmowa bowiem nasza sam na sam trwała niedługo [p. 132]¹⁴.

[Reisu-l-ulema was waiting in his office. An old gray man over seventy years old greeted me in Arabic, but soon we switched to Turkish. I had never seen him before and I had not heard his name. His name was Hadži Hafiz Ibrahim Maglajlić. He had been a mufti in Banja Luka and was known for his conservatism. He was very kind to me, but you could not find him to be as hospitable as Čaušević's former reisu-l-ulema had shown me two years earlier. I cannot say much about him, because we our private conversation was not long].

Szynkiewicz used scarce description to present the image of his interlocutor as a well-mannered, polite, yet and conservative man. The description is mixed with the author's information, in which he explained the quality of description with poor knowledge of Maglajlić. On this occasion, the author

¹⁴ All quotes come from : G. Czerwiński, *Sprawozdania z podróży muftiego Jakuba Szynkiewicza*, op. cit. The page number is given in the main text.

attempted to analyze relations between the new Muslim representative and his subordinates, for example, insisting that all matters had really been considered by Hasan Rebac, the former head of the Department of the Muslim Ministry of Religions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The author also concentrated on the situation of Muslims in Yugoslavia. The characteristics of the religious group described by Szynekiewicz is polarized on the north – south axis and Muslims – dissenters axis. One of the most important features of this religious group is, according to Szynekiewicz, its geographical and ethnic division. Mufti emphasized that only recently Yugoslav Muslims were divided into the northern Slavs to great extent living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, represented by the reisu-l-ulema from Sarajevo and the southern ones, mostly Turks and Albanians, led by the Great Mufti from Belgrade. Maglajlić's appointment as the reisu-l-ulema of all Muslims of Yugoslavia was perceived as an attempt to merge these divided groups.

Szynekiewicz's text, however, presents another discrepancy among representatives of the Muslim minority; there was a sharp division between the old clergy and the young Muslims. The Polish Mufti describes a situation that occurred during the ceremony of appointing a reisu-l-ulema, when the speeches of people whose views were considered as "new" [p. 137], were disapproved by the present elderly. Some of the reformist Muslims (Szynekiewicz's does not give names) in their solemn speeches made critical remarks about the condition of Islam in Yugoslavia and expressed their dissatisfaction with the work of Muslim scholars who, according to them, misinterpreted the Quran. As the author points out, they hoped for an improvement in the situation of religious education in the country through the appointment of a new reisu-l-ulema. However, older mullahs present at the ceremony disapproved of these postulates:

Zauważyłem, że siedzący koło mnie starzy duchowni przemówieniami tych osób nie byli zbyt zadowoleni, a jednego z nich prosto nazywali „manafik”, co znaczy: hipokryta [p. 137].

[I noticed that the old clergymen sitting next to me were not very happy with the speeches of these people, and one simply called one of them "manafik", which means: a hypocrite].

Further in the text, we also learn that the choice of Maglajlić for reisu-l-ulema was also controversial among Szynekiewicz's interlocutors. The Polish Mufti notes that a large part of the clergy believed the candidate to be too old and due to his conservative views he could neither unite Muslims of Yugo-

slavia nor understand and deal with the new realities of twentieth-century Europe [p. 141]. They argued that the Great Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mehmed Džemaludin Čaušević would have been a better candidate for this position. Szynkiewicz himself seems to have shared this opinion. The Polish author often expresses his favour towards Čaušević, while he describes the conservative Maglajić with a greater perspective.

According to him, the choice of Maglajić was the reason for Čaušević's conflict with the Yugoslavian authorities and with the board of wakufs and arguments resulting from cooperation between the minister and reisu-l-ulema of Sarajevo on a new law concerning the management of wakufs. As proof of the quality of this piece of information, Szynkiewicz adds that he received it firsthand („O tym opowiadali mi bliżsi współpracownicy byłego reisu-l-ulemy” [p.141]¹⁵). He demonstrates the clear and strong relations between the Yugoslav followers of Islam:

Jeden z członków medżlisu (Kolegium) z goryczą powiedział, że między muzułmanami w Jugosławii nie ma jedności: każdy chciałby zjeść drugiego. Rezultat takich stosunków – wybory nowego reisu-l-ulemy, który zupełnie nie odpowiada swemu stanowisku [p. 141].

[One of the members of the medjlis bitterly said that there is no unity between Muslims in Yugoslavia: They are willing to be at each other's throats. The result of such relations – the election of a new reisu-l-ulema, which does not correspond to his position].

Szynkiewicz further points out the disagreements which were present not only among Muslims. The relations between Islamists and the authorities were complex too. The Yugoslavian government seems to have aimed at reducing the importance of Muslims in the country. Mufti recalls an agrarian reform carried out a few years earlier in Yugoslavia, which resulted in many Muslim families were expropriated from the land and as a result did not feel as full citizens of Yugoslavia [p. 141]. In another example, Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided into six banats, which resulted in Muslims becoming a minority in each separate administrative unit [p. 142].

The tense situation between Muslims and followers of other religions is also evident. From Szynkiewicz's observation, the neighbours of Yugoslavian Muslims still recalled the cooperation of the latter with the Turks¹⁶,

¹⁵ “The close colleagues and fellows of the former reisu-l-ulema told me about it”.

¹⁶ According to Mufti, Turko is an insolent synonym of Muslims.

which was the cause of mutual distrust and dislike. At the same time, according to Szynekiewicz, North Muslims were better treated, unlike Albanians and Turks from the South, who not only followed a different religion than the Orthodox followers but also speak another language: "Jeżeli Serb-prawosławny traktuje z góry muzułmanina Serba, to tym bardziej naciska on na muzułmanina Turka i Albańczyka" [p. 142]¹⁷. Tense relations, as the Mufti informs, became the cause of emigration for many families of Turkish and Albanian origins to Turkey.

The Polish Mufti also saw the bright sides of the Yugoslavian Muslims' complicated situation comparing it with that of their Catholic neighbours, who could hardly bear the domination by Orthodox Serbs. Szynekiewicz argued that Muslims more easily adapted to living in a regime situation regardless of their place of residence. Dealing with politics was unfamiliar to them and aroused disgust. Most important thing for them was work, the opportunity to earn a living and freedom of religion. The authority that gives such opportunities is not neglected by the followers of Allah. The situation was different for Croatian Catholics who,

[...] w ciągu długich lat przyzwyczaili się do samorządów, do życia parlamentarnego. Wysoko kulturalnym Chorwatom jest bardzo ciężko podporządkować się mniej kulturalnym Serbom, którzy są mało zdolni do pracy, a posiadają tylko przewagę fizyczną, żołnierską. Rządy austriackie i organizacja duchowieństwa katolickiego dużo przyczyniły się do podjęcia na wysoki stopień kultury Chorwatów. Oni z wszystkich narodowości Jugosławii są najlepiej zorganizowani i najbardziej przygotowani do walki i dlatego dla Serbów-prawosławnych Słowianie Chorwaci są niebezpieczniejsi niż muzułmanie-Turcy południowej Jugosławii [p. 142].

[have become accustomed to local governments, to parliamentary life for many years. It is very difficult for well-educated Croats to surrender to common Serbs who are unfit for work and have only a physical and military advantage. Austrian governments and the organization of the Catholic clergy have contributed a lot to the high level of Croatian culture. From all the nationalities of Yugoslavia they are the best organized and prepared to fight, and therefore the Slav Croats are more dangerous for the Orthodox Serbs than the Muslim Turks of southern Yugoslavia].

According to Szynekiewicz, both Croatian Catholics and Turkish-Bosnian Muslims opposed the new Yugoslavian authorities. The numerous

¹⁷ "If a Serb-Orthodox looks down on a Serb Muslim then he humiliates a Muslim Turk and Albanian".

reasons for the disunity included religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences. The citizens of Yugoslavia had lived for many generations but quite separately.

Szynkiewicz describes Yugoslavian Muslims as peaceful and loyal citizens, not interfering in political games¹⁸, but he still criticizes them. Their difficult situation resulted not only from the actions of Yugoslavian authorities that discriminated religions other than Orthodoxy but also from the mentality of Muslims themselves, whose peacefulness often turned into passivity and laziness. In order to illustrate the problem, the author portrayed this group as a single characteristic Yugoslavian Muslim rather than one with individual qualities:

Bardzo charakterystycznym zjawia się typ byłych właścicieli ziemi, nie posiadających ani wiedzy, ani wykształcenia, których reforma rolna wyrzuciła wprost na ulicę. Za ostatnie pieniądze założył taki obywatel sklep. Siedzi w nim cały dzień, wypija kawy i wypala papierosów za dzieńsić dinarów, a zarobi wszystkiego pięć. Jak może on walczyć z życiem? Za dużo jeszcze w Bośniaku pozostało spadku po Turkach – spokój i niechęć do ruchu [p. 142].

[A very characteristic type refers to the former landowners who have neither knowledge nor education, who were kicked to the curb. Such a man founded a store for the last money. He's staying there all day, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes for ten dinars, and making only five dinars. How can he fight life? Too much Turkish legacy remains in a Bosnian – peace and reluctance to move].

Another interesting nuance of the Mufti's report is his remark on contacts with the Yugoslavian media. He gave interviews during his official visit in 1930 to Belgrade's newspapers "Vreme" and "Glasnik", Sarajevo's "Jugoslovenska Pošta" and the Muslim magazine "Novi Behar". During his stay in Yugoslavia, from 2 to 5 November 1930, the Yugoslavian media published a number of articles about Poland, Polish Muslims and the Mufti. This interest could have been influenced by the fact that the Polish Mufti was probably

¹⁸ This description, referring in other texts to Polish Muslims, was consistent with the inter-war historiosophical thought of Polish Tatars, who portrayed Polish Muslims as faithful citizens and devoted soldiers standing alongside the Republic of Poland during all major battles in the history of the country on the Vistula River. See on this subject: W. Wendland, *„Trzy czoła proroków z matki obcej”. Myśl historyczna Tatarów polskich w II Rzeczypospolitej* [“Three Foreheads of the Prophets of a Foreign Mother”. Historical Thought of the Polish Tatars in the Second Polish Republic], Kraków: Universitas, 2013.

the only representative of Muslims from outside Yugoslavia at the reisu-l-ulema nomination ceremony. As Szyrkiewicz notes:

nikogo nie było z przedstawicieli duchowieństwa muzułmańskiego spoza Jugosławii, oprócz Polski. Z innych wyznań przyjechał jeno rabin żydowski. Patriarcha zaś prawosławny i arcybiskup katolicki przysłali swoich przedstawicieli [pp. 143–144].

[No representative of the Muslim clergy from outside Yugoslavia, except for Poland was present. Only a Jewish rabbi represented other religions. However, the Orthodox patriarch and the Catholic archbishop sent their representatives].

In conclusion, I would like to add that Mufti Szyrkiewicz's trips to Yugoslavia were just one of many aspects of Tatar-Bosnian cultural relations. Stefan Bzarewski (1871–1949), another Tatar and the author of a report entitled *Muzułmanie w Jugosławii* [Muslims in Yugoslavia]¹⁹, also went to Yugoslavia in the interwar years. An interesting subject is also the idea and plan of teaching Polish Muslims in the madras in Sarajevo, which was described by historians²⁰. During the interwar period the Polish Tatars also printed their religious books in Sarajevo, as there were no printable fonts with the Arabic alphabet²¹ in Poland. There were probably many more connections between the Polish Tartars and Yugoslavian Muslims. These two ethnic groups are after all ethnic European Muslims, a bridge between the Western culture and the culture of the Muslim Orient.

¹⁹ S. Bzarewski, *Muzułmanie w Jugosławii* [Muslims in Yugoslavia], "Życie Tatarskie" 1936, no. 12, pp. 266–269 and 1937, no. 1, pp. 4–8. This work, although has a reporting form and lacks literary narrative techniques, is a very interesting example of press report in terms of the presented topic.

²⁰ U. Wróblewska, op. cit., pp. 75–81.

²¹ Eg. *Tadźwid. Nauka czytania Koranu* [Tadźwid. Teaching to Read Quran], Sarajevo 1935.